

THE LONG MARCH

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kingdom under Sobhuza I and Mswati and the various Ngoni States. Despite their common social and cultural origin these emergent polities had each its distinctive features. The special characteristics of Ngoni society are at least in part understandable as due to the differences in its social environment as compared with Zulu and Swazi. The Ngoni were migrants, whereas Zulu and Swazi were not. The Ngoni captured a large number of men and women of non-Ngoni origin who were assimilated into the Ngoni State as individuals, whereas for the most part the Zulu and Swazi States expanded by the incorporation of existing social groups as groups, not as individuals, and these groups, if not all Nguni in origin, at least belonged to closely allied peoples.

Thus to set the Ngoni in proper perspective we must begin with a brief description of their Nguni forebears. In the eighteenth century the Nguni were grouped into a large number of small chiefdoms each containing a dominant agnatic lineage segment to which the chief belonged. Each chiefdom contained segments of other lineages, and most lineages had segments in a number of chiefdoms, one segment being dominant in its chiefdom. Lineages were exogamous, their members were graded in terms of primogeniture and the ranking of wives, and as a result of quarrels segments transferred their allegiance from one chief to another or even founded new chiefdoms. Most residential settlements were small, containing only the agnatic descendants of a living man, with their wives and children, and were divided into three sections or 'houses', led by the great, right- and left-hand wives of the polygynous head of the settlement. There were also larger homesteads containing the dwellings of chiefs and other members of the dominant lineage as well as those of many genealogically unrelated dependants. The chief was assisted by his agnatic kinsmen and by the heads of non-chiefly lineage segments and by other unrelated men whom he placed as lieutenants, or indunas, in charge of districts or responsible for specific administrative, judicial or military tasks. For fighting and hunting the men of the chiefdom were organized in divisions, each attached to a royal homestead. There was also an organization of youths into small age-sets, groupings of coevals who had been circumcised together.

At the turn of the century, with the emergence of large kingdoms, each containing many chiefdoms under the leadership of a king, the age-set system changed its form and the royal homesteads acquired greater significance. Circumcision was discontinued and the age-sets began to be organized on a national basis. Each age-set constituted a regiment in the national army, had its barracks